

## FOUND DEAD IN THE SHAFT

BY WALTER FENTON.

"Good-by, my son, good-by. My earnest prayers shall be offered up for your soul's welfare," said good Father Veigh, the aged priest, as he pressed the hand of a young man who occupied the condemned cell in Walworth jail.

The prisoner muttered an indistinct farewell, and then the heavy door closed upon the retreating form of his spiritual adviser, and the doomed man was alone. He remained for a moment standing close by the closed door, and then, with a weary sigh, he crossed the narrow cell, and sat down upon the side of his couch.

"Oh, God!" he cried, in a voice of despair and anguish, "must this terrible crime be committed—must I die upon the gallows for a crime of which I am innocent? Oh, is there no escape, no way in which my innocence may be proved? My God! my God! I shall go mad! My wife—my young wife—oh, just Heaven! what will become of her? To die, to look no more upon the face of her whom I love, who but two short weeks ago became my bride! Nevermore to see this fair earth—nevermore, nevermore!"

The prisoner buried his face in his hands, and again repeated the words "nevermore, nevermore," with a wailing, moaning modulation that was inexpressibly sad. For some time he remained thus, but finally he arose, and began to pace the limits of his prison with rapid, nervous strides. His head was bowed, and his eyes fixed upon the floor. Presently he paused as though he had come to some determination, or had resolved upon some act, and again seating himself upon the side of his cot, he drew from its concealment in the side of the bedding a vial. Holding it up he gazed upon the label and read aloud:

"Prussic acid! Is it not best that I should meet death here alone in my prison cell, rather than face my public ignominious doom? A drop of this colorless liquid will end my troubles here, but what comes after life closes? Oh, that I could but look beyond the veil; that I could but know the fate of the soul of him who by his own act sends his spirit into the presence of his Maker. I hesitate, for I cannot solve the sublime mystery of death, and I cannot face the unknown terrors of that future to mortals never revealed. To-morrow I am doomed to die. When the sunlight of another day shall glid the east, life ends for me. Oh, can I not gather courage to anticipate the few brief hours that are left me?"

Thus the condemned man mused, and he still held in his hand the vial of deadly poison. He was striving to determine upon an awful act, and his features worked nervously, while his eyes were fixed upon the vial with a fascinated gaze. What must be the condition of mind of him who takes his own life? What chaotic gloom, what abnormal disorganization of the mental faculties must take place ere man becomes a self-murderer—a suicide.

Poor Albert Rauen must at this time have been irresponsible for his acts; for we cannot think that a sane man ever becomes a suicide. That all mankind dread death is as true as the old Latin proverb, "mors omnibus communis"—death is common to all—and insanity alone overcomes this natural fear. Suddenly the young man sprang to his feet, and glanced wildly about his cell, as though he feared that he was watched, and when satisfied that no one observed his act, he drew the stopper from the vial.

"I will do it!" he muttered. "Yes, yes, I will swallow the poison—will spare my wife and friends the disgrace of my being hanged! God forgive me if I sin and have mercy on my soul!"

He raised the vial to his lips. In another instant he will drain the fatal draught to the very dregs. Oh, if he only knew what—But we must not anticipate.

That the reader may clearly comprehend what follows, we will briefly relate the circumstances of the crime of which the young prisoner, Albert Rauen, was convicted.

Several months previous to our opening scene, William Redmond, the "mine boss" at the great

Moosic mine, had discharged a miner by the name of Saul Kayth, and the morning succeeding the day on which he had discharged this man he went down the shaft very early—before any other person had descended except Albert Rauen. The duties of the latter required him to be the first in the mine; he was the "foot-tender," which is the name applied to the person who runs the cars on and off the carriage at the bottom of the shaft.

When William Redmond reached the "foot," he found Albert Rauen at his post, and directed him to go to the mule stable, which was in a distant part of the mine, and ascertain that all was right there. Albert Rauen obeyed, and when he left him, William Redmond was seated upon a powder keg, writing in his time book by the aid of a mine lamp.

Rauen had been absent from the "foot" but a few moments, when a man stepped out from behind a pillar where he had concealed himself. At the sound of other's footsteps Redmond looked up quickly, and to his surprise saw Saul Kayth. The lamplight fell full upon his face, and Redmond saw that the man looked sullen and fierce. The thought came to his mind:

"How came this man here? I was told by the engineer that no man except Rauen was in the mine."

"Mr. Redmond," said Saul Kayth, "will you let me have my old place back?"

"No," answered the mine boss, firmly, "I will not. You can't have work in this mine again. How came you here?"

"I don't know that that is any of your affair," answered the man.

"Very well. I see you are inclined to be insolent. Leave the mine at once. You can pull the bell-rope, then jump upon the carriage, and you will be raised by means of the engine to the surface of the earth. Never come here again."

"You are boss here, and I suppose I must do as you say," replied Kayth, meekly, "but by and by I shouldn't wonder if there'd be a change."

With this remark Kayth stepped back a pace or two, and then, with a movement as sudden and unexpected as the act could be executed, he bounded upon the surprised mine boss, and dealt him three terrible blows upon the head with a heavy piece of iron coupling. William Redmond sank back upon the earth dead, for his skull had been fractured in three distinct places.

The assassin gazed for a moment upon his victim, and then, as he heard the returning steps of Albert Rauen, a devilish thought occurred to his mind; he would fasten the crime upon that innocent man.

He hated Rauen, and his malice would in this way be gratified, and at the same time his own connection with the crime would be concealed.

He took Rauen's coat from a bench upon which its owner had carelessly thrown it, and deliberately dabbled it in the crimson life-tide that flowed from the terrible wounds in the head of the dead man; then he hastened away.

When Rauen arrived at the "foot," with his lamp on his head, he almost fell over the body of Redmond, and when he saw that he was dead, evidently murdered, a terrible excitement took possession of his mind, and he hardly realized what he did.

Trembling, he drew the body of the dead man upon the carriage, and then he pulled the bell-rope and gave the engineer at the mouth of the mine the signal to hoist. He was himself about to step upon the carriage, when he bethought him of his coat and sprang to get it, for the carriage had already begun to ascend, when his hand came in contact with something wet and sticky upon the garment, and raising his hand so that the lamplight rested upon it, he saw with terror and surprise that it was covered with crimson stains of fresh blood!

He turned to get upon the carriage, but he was too late; it was beyond his reach and rapidly rising up the shaft. He could by means of the bell have stopped the carriage and caused it to be lowered again, but in that moment of intense excitement he lost all presence of mind, and did not think of the bell until the carriage reached the surface of the earth.

Up, up, rose the carriage, bear-

ing its ghastly burden to the light of day, and that silent, lifeless witness against Albert Rauen was by his own hand sent to testify against him, for the bell had been rung, and the engineer could swear that he had lowered no one save the dead man and Albert Rauen into the mine that day. No one had remained in the mine over night; for he swore he had drawn up every soul who was in it the day before. The dead man could not have rung the bell, therefore Albert Rauen must have rung it. The dead man had been killed by another hand than his own; the nature and condition of his wounds proved that fact conclusively. Albert Rauen was the only man besides himself in the mine; hence Albert Rauen must have been the guilty one. Thus reasoned the prosecution when Rauen was tried for his life, and the defense had rebutted this evidence by showing, by evidence of credible witnesses, that there was another means of entrance into the mine besides the main shaft, and that it was possible for a man to descend into the mine by this route without the knowledge of the engineer.

That entrance was through the air shaft, which was at a distance of two miles from the main shaft, and was descended by stairs. It was never used by the miners, and was only provided in compliance with the mine ventilation law as a way of escape should the main shaft from any cause become impassable, as was the case at Avondale, where so many brave miners perished like rats in a trap.

Although the defense proved that it was possible for a person to have thus entered the mine, they could not prove that such had been the fact, and therefore it was that Albert Rauen was found guilty of the awful crime of murder. His blood-stained coat, and excited, frightened manner had aided in convicting him. His case was indeed a sad one, for he had been but recently married, and a long and happy life seemed before him.

Now we return to his prison cell.

Albert Rauen held the vial of prussic acid to his lips, and again for an instant paused. That pause saved him from drinking the poison, for he heard footsteps in the corridor outside his cell, and a voice which was to him the dearest in all the world—the voice of his wife. In a moment he thrust the vial into his pocket and flew to the door, which was presently opened, and his wife came into the cell. The imperiled man and the woman he loved were for a moment clasped in each other's arms in a fervent embrace, and the tears streamed down the cheeks of the fair young girl as she gazed upon the face of him whom she knew she should see no more on earth.

"Albert! Albert!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my darling, my darling! how can we part? How can I give you up?"

He kissed her pale face and strove to seem calm. In the momentary excitement of her arrival he had not observed that the vial of poison had fallen from his pocket upon the floor, but his wife saw it and picked it up. She read the label: "Prussic acid," and then she looked upon her doomed husband with a sorrowful, reproachful glance. She understood it all, and without a word she placed the vial upon the floor, and crushed it beneath her heel into a thousand fragments.

"How could you contemplate such a sin? Oh, Albert, I prayed all last night that you might be saved, and some way, when morning came, a peaceful calm came to my heart; and, oh! Albert, it seemed to me just as though my prayer was answered."

"No, dear, nothing can save me now! To-morrow is the day!"

When the time came for these two loving hearts to part, even the stony-hearted jailer was moved, and he turned away to hide the tears that rushed unbidden to his eyes.

When the wife was gone, the prisoner paced his cell until morning came. When the orb of day rose over the eastern horizon he was led forth to die. With a terrible effort of will he summoned courage, and ascended the gallows with a firm step.

Every act in the awful drama was performed according to custom, and the black cap was drawn over his head, the noose adjusted, and the sheriff was about to spring the trap that would hurl the soul

of Albert Rauen into eternity, when a voice shouted in clarion tones:

"Hold! Hold!"

It was the day before that set for the execution of Albert Rauen when, at the little mining hamlet of St. Crois, a terrible mine accident occurred. The hamlet of St. Crois was distant nearly a hundred miles from the town in which Albert Rauen was to be hanged. The accident to which we refer was an extensive "cave in" of the White Meadow Mine, and some eight or more miners were killed and many others wounded.

Among those who were fatally injured, and who knew they must surely die, was a strange, reticent man who had only been employed in the White Meadow mine for a few months.

"Are you sure, doctor, that I cannot get well?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, in answer to the miner's question. "No power on earth can save you—you will die."

A look of fear came upon the face of the wounded man.

"I have something to tell you, doctor, and if it is to do a poor cuss who is doomed to die any good, it must be told at once. You have heard of the Redmond murder case? Well, I am the guilty man! I went down into the mine during the night through the air shaft, and I killed Redmond! Albert Rauen is innocent!"

It was almost morning when the miner made this confession, and he paused to breathe a moment after the word "innocent," and then he said:

"My true name is Saul Kayth, though I call myself by another name here."

An hour afterward the murderer's soul had gone to answer for his crime at the bar of that great court, above all earthly tribunals of justice—the bar of God.

The doctor had at once dispatched a messenger to the nearest telegraph station, but there had been delay in finding the operator, and when found he experienced difficulty in finding the operator at Walworth. "Tick, tick, tick," sounded over and over again, until the messenger, who knew that a human life depended upon the telegram, was almost frantic. But at last a response was made and the dispatch sent.

The person who shouted "Hold!" just as the tragedy was about to be completed, was the messenger with the telegram that declared the innocence of the condemned. The sheriff ran his eye over the message, and in a moment he ordered Albert Rauen to be set free.

Amid the cheers of the crowd he descended from the scaffold, and walked away among his friends.

The joy of his wife was boundless, and even those who were most willing to believe that he murdered the man whom he found dead in the shaft, were now first to offer him congratulations.

Albert Rauen is an old man now, but when he tells the story of his trial for murder, a prayer of thankfulness always follows it.—N. Y. Weekly.

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